

# Exploring Tone and Irony

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## TONE

The **tone** of a story is like the author's "tone of voice"—it expresses the writers' own attitude toward his or her characters, setting, conflict, and other elements of the story.

**Varieties of tone** An author's tone can be as varied as "tone of voice" can sound in real life. It can be silly or thoughtful, chatty or formal, comic or tragic.

Sometimes tone is more complex, expressing a mixture of attitudes that may even seem to contradict themselves; for instance, the tone could be humorous, but with an undercurrent of sadness; serious, but with overtones of playfulness.

**The effect of tone on the reader** The author's tone has a direct impact on how the reader responds to the story. Different tones can cause readers to experience such varying emotions as pity, fear, horror, or humor.

If the author's tone is distant, for example, readers are less likely to feel as close to the characters than if the tone were more sympathetic.

## IRONY

**Irony** is a particular kind of tone.

**Verbal irony** Speakers use verbal irony when the meaning they wish to communicate is different from, or actually *opposite* to, what their actual words seem to say.

- **Hyperbole** is an exaggerated statement used to make a strong effect; an example would be "I'll never get this fishline untangled in a million years."
- **Understatement**, the opposite of hyperbole, involves saying less than you really feel for ironic effect—such as saying, after almost having been hit by a bus, "Well, now that that little excitement is over, how about some tea?"

**Uses of irony** Sometimes by expressing an idea indirectly, speakers can say more than if they communicate their feelings more directly.

By communicating opposite ideas at the same time, authors use irony for humorous or serious effects. They do this by contrasting the way characters feel about a situation with how a more objective observer might view it.

## QUESTIONS TO ASK WHILE YOU ARE READING A SHORT STORY:

1. Is there a prevailing tone used in the story? What is the emotional effect of the tone on the reader?
2. Where does the author make use of irony? For what purposes?